AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

Claims 1 through 11(Canceled)

12. (New) A device including:

(a) a shaft having at least one flexible portion along its length between a proximal end and a distal end;

(b) at least two longitudinally bendable pulling and/or pushing elements, the at least two pulling and/or pushing elements each extending to the proximal end of the shaft and each acting on the shaft in an axial direction of the shaft at locations spaced apart from the proximal end of the shaft further than at least part of the at least one flexible portion; and

(c) a fixing device located in a fixed position with respect to the shaft adjacent to the proximal end of the shaft, the fixing device having each of the at least two pulling and/or pushing elements extending there through, and being adapted to reside alternatively in a releasing position in which the pulling and/or pushing elements are unsecured to the fixing device and are substantially free to move axially there through, or a locking position in which each pulling and/or pushing element is fixed in place with respect to the fixing device.

13. (New) The device of Claim 12 wherein the shaft comprises a leaf spring having a ring-shaped cross-section.

14. (New) The device of Claim 12 wherein each pulling and/or pushing element comprises a rope which is substantially rigid in its longitudinal direction.

15. (New) The device of Claim 12 wherein each pulling and/or pushing element is received within a respective guide element within the shaft so as to be slidable longitudinally with respect to the respective guide element.

16. (New) The device of Claim 12 wherein the pulling and/or pushing elements are mounted in the shaft at an inner circumference of the shaft.

17. (New) The device of Claim 12 wherein each pulling and/or pushing element acts upon the shaft in such a way that it is limited to pulling and pushing directions for the respective pulling and/or pushing element.

18. (New) The device of Claim 12 further including two lateral guides extending longitudinally inside the shaft on opposite sides thereof, each lateral guide being fixed to the shaft along at least a portion of the length of the respective lateral guide.

19. (New) The device of Claim 12 wherein the shaft includes an interior longitudinal channel.

20. (New) The device of Claim 19 further including an optical light guide or an optical image guide extending within the channel.

21. (New) The device of Claim 12 wherein the pulling and/or pushing elements are arranged in pairs with each pulling and/or pushing element in a respective pair engaging the shaft in the axial direction at substantially the same distance from the proximal end of the shaft.

22. (New) The device of Claim 12 wherein the pulling and/or pushing elements are arranged symmetrically about the shaft.

23. (New) A device including:

(a) a shaft having at least one flexible portion along its length between a proximal end and a distal end;

(b) at least two longitudinally bendable pulling and/or pushing elements, the at least two pulling and/or pushing elements each extending to the proximal end of the shaft and each acting on the shaft in an axial direction of the shaft at locations spaced apart from the proximal end of the shaft; and

(c) a fixing device located at or adjacent to the proximal end of the shaft, the fixing device in a releasing position enabling the pulling and/or pushing elements to move axially there through to enable the shaft to be bent to a desired shape, and the fixing device in the locking position locking the pushing and/or pushing elements in place with respect to the fixing device to retain the shaft in the desired shape.

24. (New) The device of Claim 23 wherein the shaft comprises a leaf spring having a ring-shaped cross-section.

25. (New) The device of Claim 23 wherein each pulling and/or pushing element is received within a respective guide element within the shaft so as to be slidable longitudinally with respect to the respective guide element.

26. (New) The device of Claim 23 further including two lateral guides extending longitudinally inside the shaft on opposite sides thereof, each lateral guide being fixed to the shaft along at least a portion of the length of the respective lateral guide.

27. (New) The device of Claim 23 wherein the shaft includes an interior longitudinal channel.

28. (New) A method for operating an endoscope-type device having a shaft with at least one flexible portion along its length between a proximal end and a distal end and at least two longitudinally bendable pulling and/or pushing elements, the at least two pulling and/or pushing elements each extending to the proximal end of the shaft and each acting on the shaft in an axial direction of the shaft at locations spaced apart from the proximal end of the shaft, the method including the steps of:

(a) placing the at least two pulling and/or pushing elements in a condition in which they are freely movable axially at the proximal end of the shaft and bending the shaft to a desired longitudinally bent shape;

(b) with the shaft in the desired bent shape, placing the at least two pulling and/or pushing elements in a condition in which they are in a fixed position prevented from moving axially at the proximal end of the shaft to fix the shaft in the desired bent shape;

(c) inserting the shaft into an inserted position in an orifice while the at least two pulling and/or pushing elements are in the fixed position fixing the shaft in the desired bent shape;

(d) with the shaft in the inserted position, placing the at least two pulling and/or pushing elements in the condition in which they are freely movable axially at the proximal end of the shaft; and

(e) moving the shaft from the inserted position in the orifice while the at least two pulling and/or pushing elements are in the condition in which they are freely movable axially at the proximal end of the shaft.

29. The method of Claim 28 wherein the step of moving the shaft from the inserted position in the orifice includes adjusting the position of the shaft to a different bent shape and further including the steps of:

(a) again placing the at least two pulling and/or pushing elements in the condition in which they are prevented from moving axially at the proximal end of the shaft to fix the shaft in the different bent shape;

(b) adjusting the position of the shaft in the orifice to an adjusted position;

(c) again placing the at least two pulling and/or pushing elements in the condition in which they are freely movable axially at the proximal end of the shaft; and

(d) entirely withdrawing the shaft from the orifice while the at least two pulling and/or pushing elements are in the condition in which they are freely movable axially at the proximal end of the shaft.